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ABSTRACT

This curriculum presentation outlines how to celebrate five Mexican holidays in the classroom: Cinco de Mayo, Dia de los Muertos, Fiesta, Las Posados, and Three Kings Day. The goal is to help children learn through hands-on activities and real-life experiences. The format for each holiday celebration includes a brief history with ideas for integrating language, lifestyles, foods, and/or crafts. Directions and patterns for the activities are included, with illustrations. Also provided are a list of materials needed, instructions, food recipes, and additional activities that involve research by the children; comparison with North American holiday traditions; and how to create paper masks, flowers, and a pinata. (NAV)

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VIVA MEXICO!

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Workshop presented at the annual meeting of
The Southern Early Childhood Association
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Little Rock, Arkansas

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VIVA MEXICO!

Children learn best through experiences and activities. They learn by doing. Real, hands-on materials, associated with a theme or topic of study, are the essence of developing interests, motivation, meaning, and true understanding in social studies classrooms. Our particular topic is the Mexican culture and how specific studies such as language, lifestyles, holidays, foods, and crafts can be introduced to young children in the classroom.

This presentation presents five Mexican holidays. The format for each holiday includes a brief history of the holiday with ideas for integrating language, lifestyles, foods, and/or crafts. Directions and patterns for the activities are included at the end.

Cinco de Mayo

Cinco de Mayo (the fifth of May) is an exciting Mexican holiday. This holiday connects Mexicans and Americans by having them to share their traditions with many friends of different heritages. Americans were very pleased with the way Mexico did not give up during the "Battle of Puebla." These celebrations include mariachi bands playing lively music and a variety of dances.

Activities

Flag of Mexico
Paper Mache Maracas
Tissue Paper Flowers

Dia de los muertos
(November 2)

Dia de los muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrates and honors the newly dead's annual pilgrimage home. At this time of the year in Mexico, death is honored in the midst of life in an artistic spiritual celebration. The cities and villages are decorated with skulls and skeletons. The relatives of the dead put candles, incense, and flowers on the graves. They often use marigolds because of the strong smell. The relatives hope that the dead will be able to follow the strong smell of the marigolds to their homes. On the second day, the Mexicans have large celebrations at their homes. They sing and dance and spend a lot of time remembering about their dead loved ones. On the third and final day they celebrate with parades that have floats and bands with lots of music.

Activity

Colorful masks

Fiesta

Fiestas are celebrations or parties that can occur on any day. Families hold fiestas to celebrate birthdays. Towns hold fiestas to honor a local hero or a patron saint. And, many fiestas are celebrated all across the country. Some, like those at Christmas are held for religious reasons. Others honor important people and events in Mexico's history.

Activities

Paper hats
Mexican Hat Dance

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Las Posados

(Nine Days Before Christmas)

Las Posadas is a nine day celebration that takes place in Mexico. It is celebrated with parties each night. Las Posadas is similar to the American Christmas holiday in that it represents the journey of Mary and Joseph, who are trying to find a resting place. Families go door to door knocking and asking for a resting place. The family is invited in for a fiesta. At the end of the party the children are allowed three swings at a pinata while blindfolded. Once the pinata is broken, fruit and candy cover the floor.

Activities

Create a pinata for the class to break open
Create individual pinatas to take home

Three Kings Day

(January 6)

Three Kings Day is connected with Christmas in Mexico. This is a holiday celebrating the journey of the three kings to bring baby Jesus their gifts. The kings wear crowns decorated with jewels. The Mexican children leave their shoes outside their homes filled with straw for the camels that the three kings traveled on. When the children get up the next day, they go to retrieve their shoes and find them filled with candy left by the three kings. Some families make a special cake filled with surprises for the children.

Activities

Bake a Three Kings Cake
Leave shoes out in the hallway during nap time and afterwards check for treat

MEXICO

DESCRIPTION: FLAG OF MEXICO

Every country has its own flag. Behind every flag, there is a fascinating story. The flag of Mexico is no exception. The insignia on the flag comes from Indian mythology. The legend goes like this:

> "Many years ago, the Aztecs lived in the northern part of Mexico. An ancient Aztec legend told that they were to move southward until they came to a place where there was a lake and good farm land. There, they would see an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its mouth. This would be the place for them to settle. One day, a group of Aztecs came upon the exact place described. They decided to settle here to make their home. Today, the home of the Aztecs is the site of Mexico City and the eagle and serpent are part of the insignia on the Mexican flag."

In this activity, children will make a Mexican flag and will place the insignia and the Aztec legend on it. Parts of the insignia are missing and it will take careful visual discrimination to find the missing parts. Skills reinforced through this activity include: spatial awareness, visual discrimination, oral language, comprehension, memory and recall, following directions, seriation and self-confidence.

MATERIALS:

- White drawing paper-9"x12"
- Red construction paper-4"x9"
- Green construction paper-4"x9"
- Insignia/legend sheet
- Stapler
- Crayons
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pencil

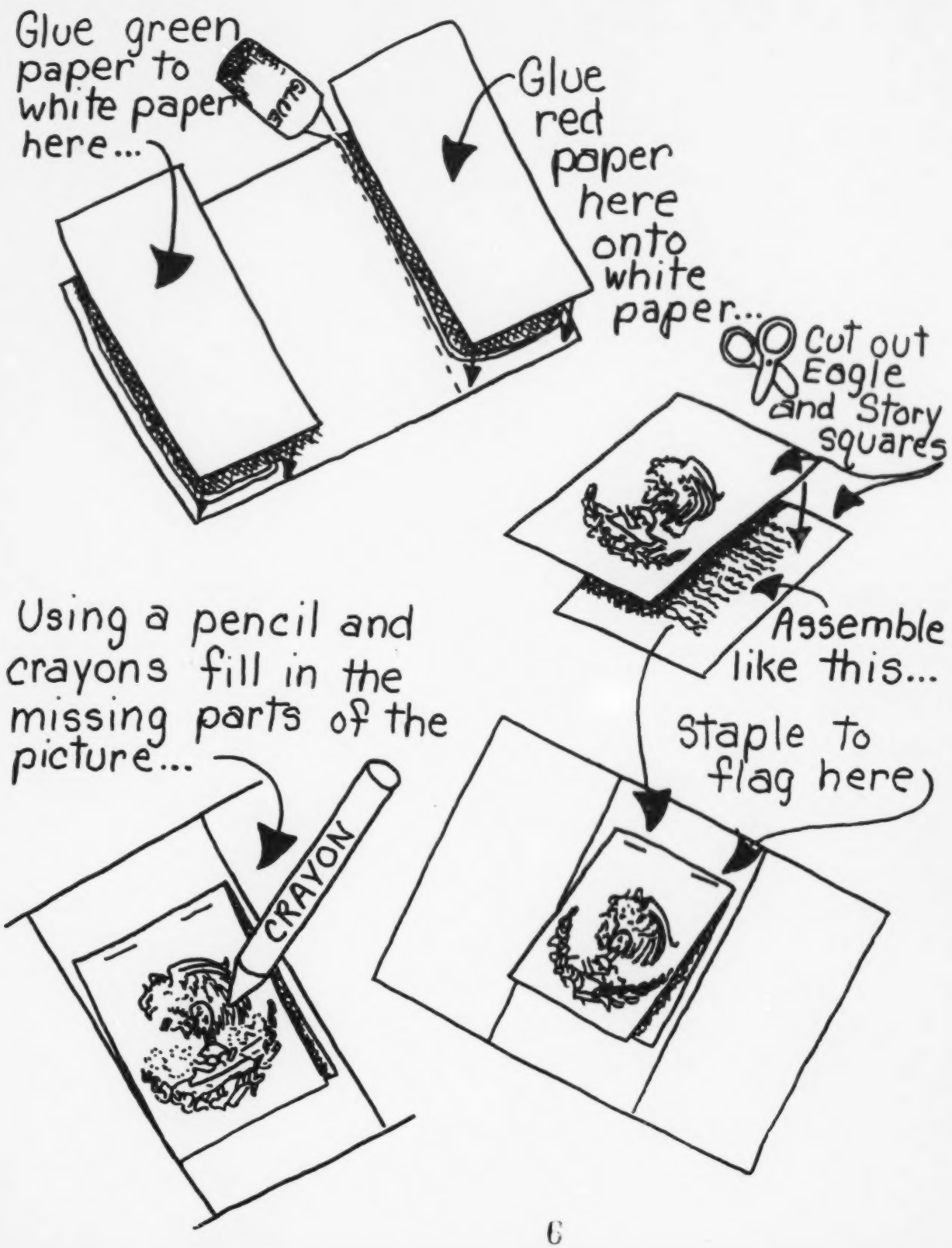
INSTRUCTIONS:

Children place and glue pieces of red and green paper in the positions shown in the illustration. Cut the Insignia/legend sheet as indicated and staple in the center of the flag. Using a pencil and crayons, fill in the missing parts of the insignia and color it.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Help the children find the story behind the flag of the state in which they were born.
What is the story behind the California flag? The flag of the United States?

Flag Of Mexico:


Glue green paper to white paper here...
GLUE
Glue red paper here onto white paper...
Cut out Eagle and Story squares
Assemble like this...
Staple to flag here
Using a pencil and crayons fill in the missing parts of the picture...
CRAYON

Flag Of Mexico :

*To help the children determine the missing parts of the insignia of the flag, it is most helpful to have a picture of the Mexican Flag or a small replica of the flag.

Many years ago, the Aztecs lived in the northern part of Mexico. An Aztec legend told that they were to move southward until they came to a place where there was a lake and good farm land. There they would see an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its mouth. This would be the place for them to settle. One day, a group of Aztecs came upon the exact place described. They decided to settle here to make their home. Today, the home of the Aztecs is the site of Mexico City and the eagle and the serpent are part of the insignia on the Mexican Flag.

MEXICO

DESCRIPTION: PAPER MACHE MARACAS

The maracas played and heard in Mexico today originated hundreds of years ago. The early Indians used drums, flutes, gourds and seashells as well as the human voice for music and dances. This ancient form of music is still played in some parts of Mexico.

In this activity, children will create replicas of the maracas, using egg cartons and paper mache instead of the original gourds. Skills reinforced through this activity include: tactile/kinesthetic skills, eye-hand co-ordination, oral language, visual discrimination, auditory discrimination, following directions, improved self-image and self-confidence, interest and rhythmic physical involvement through the musical instrument.

MATERIALS:

- 2 egg carton sections
- Small sturdy sticks-inexpensive chopsticks work very well
- Popcorn kernels or small rocks
- Newspaper--torn into narrow strips
- Wheat paste and water
- Masking tape
- Paint-tempera
- Small brush

INSTRUCTIONS:

Place the popcorn kernels or rocks inside of the egg carton sections and tape the carton sections together. Poke a hole in one end of the carton and wedge the stick in the hole so that it can serve as a handle. Apply several coats of paper mache, using the newspaper strips dipped in the wheat paste. Bring several layers of newspaper strips down on the handle to give it strength and securely hold it in place. Let the maraca dry thoroughly. It can then be painted a solid color with stripes or designs added in contrasting colors.

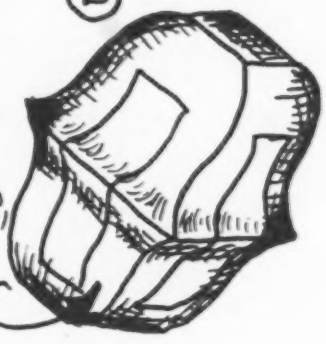
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Encourage the children to create other musical instruments. The E.S.S. (Elementary Science) Unit on Musical Instruments offers many good suggestions.

Paper Mache Maracas:

① Place the popcorn, or rocks, inside the two egg cartons

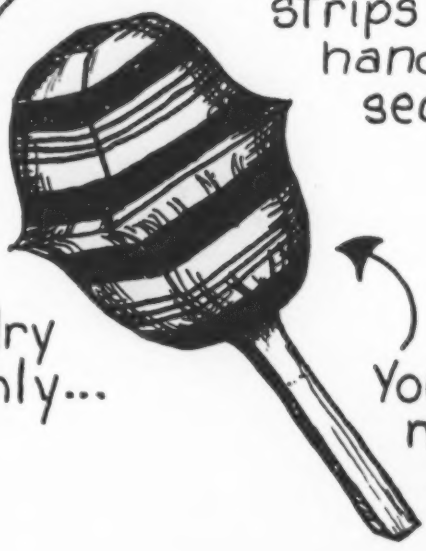
Place the egg cartons together as shown...



② Using masking tape, tape egg carton sections together

Poke a hole in one end and wedge a stick for a handle...

③ Apply several coats of paper mache, using newspaper strips dipped in wheat paste. Bring strips down onto the handle to hold it securely in place...



④ Let the maraca dry thoroughly...

Your maraca may now be painted and decorated as desired...

Mexican Tissue-Paper Flowers

1. Take six sheets of tissue paper and fold them like a fan. You can use several different co for each flower, or you can make a solidly-colored flower.
2. Cut the folded paper in half. Each half will make one flower.
3. Take one half at a time, still folded, and trim both ends into a broad point.
4. Bend a twist tie around the center of each folded strip of paper.
5. Gently separate each layer of the folded paper by pulling upwards and downwards until y have formed a circular shape.
6. Tape the ends together at the top and bottom so the flower will stay open.
7. Decorate your classroom with lots of these flowers. Have your students make collages, p tures, paintings, diaramas, etc., showing what they have learned about Mexico. Invite anc class, the principal, and parents to view your Mexican Art Gallery.

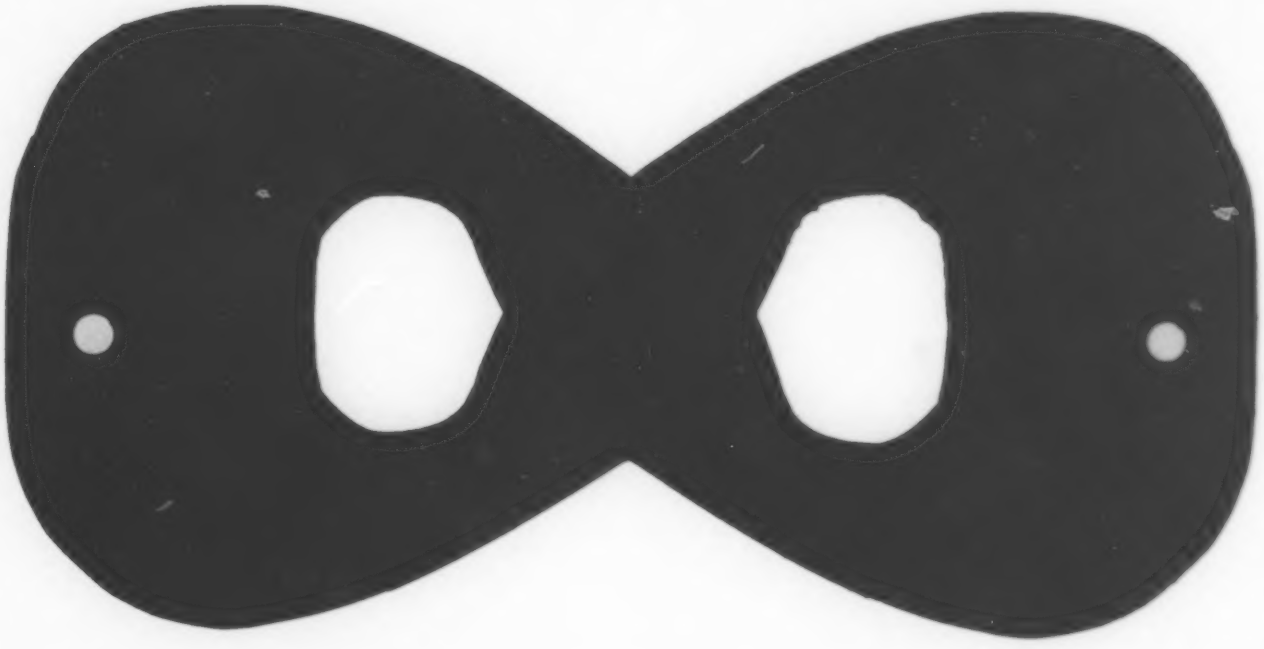
MASKS

Materials:

- Construction paper with pre-drawn mask lines
- Scissors
- Glue
- Tape
- Crayons
- Glitter
- Sequins
- Feathers
- Hole punch
- Yarn

Directions:

1. Cut the mask out following the pre-drawn lines.
2. Punch holes for the ties.
3. Decorate the mask with glitter, sequins, crayons, and feathers.
4. Attach string for ties.



MEXICO

DESCRIPTION: SOMBREROS

At one time, California was a part of Mexico. Spanish was the language that was spoken. People lived on ranchos--a large area of land that was used to grow crops and to raise livestock and cattle. The word "ranch" came from the rancho. Cowboys who lived and worked on the ranchos were called vaqueros. It was a colorful time in the history of California. On holidays, everyone would gather at the ranchos for parties called fiestas. There would be music, food and dancing for all. Everyone would wear their best clothes. The men wore wide brimmed hats called sombreros. The sombreros made of straw would be worn for everyday for protection from the hot sun. Very ornate sombreros made of felt may be worn for special occasions. A large, fancy white sombrero is a part of the men's national costume. Today, the velvet sombreros, trimmed with white or silver braid, are very popular with visitors to Mexico.

In this activity, children will make sombreros out of paper and will fit them to their heads. They may decorate them as they wish and wear them as a culminating activity for the study of the Mexican people and the country of Mexico. Skills reinforced through this activity include: tactile/kinesthetic experiences, eye-hand co-ordination, visual discrimination and awareness, following directions, measurement, self-image, self confidence, interests and aesthetic awareness.

MATERIALS:

- Squares of butcher paper--36" square or 45" square (2 per child)
- String
- Wheat paste
- Paint-tempera
- Brushes
- Scissors
- Newspaper** (may be used to make the entire hat)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Place a square of paper on the floor and cover the entire piece with wheat paste, mixed as if used for paper mache. Place a second square of paper over the wheat paste and press gently together. Place the squares(while still damp) on a child's head, shaping a crown to fit the child's head. Tie a string firmly around the base of the crown to hold it in the desired shape. Remove the hat from the child's head and stuff the crown with newspaper. Set the hat on the floor and smooth out the brim, turning it up as desired. Trim off excess paper with scissors, shaping the brim as you trim. Let the hat dry thoroughly. Carefully, remove the string and the newspaper stuffing. Paint designs on the sombrero as desired. The entire sombrero may be painted if desired. As an added effect, a strip of crepe paper may be added as a hat band.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

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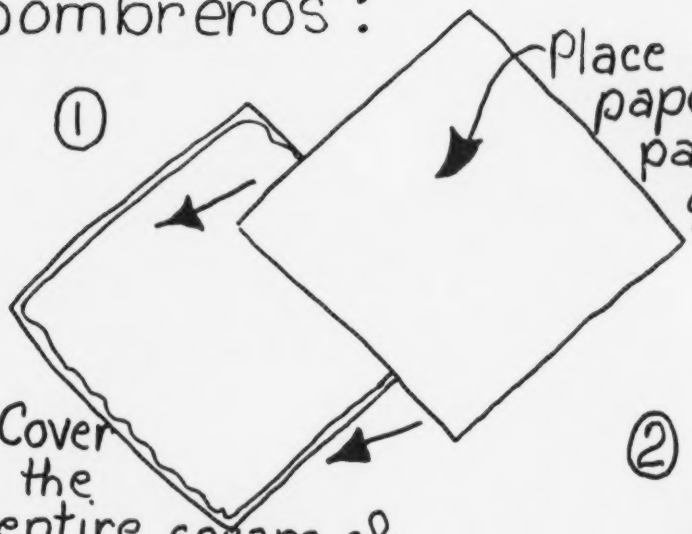
See how many different kinds of hats can be made using this method.

Sombreros:

①



Place second piece of paper over wheat paste and press gently...

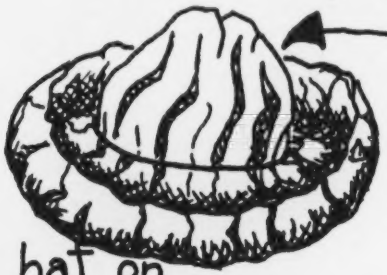
Cover the entire square of butcher paper with wheat paste...

②

Place the square (while still damp) on the child's head shaping the crown and tieing a string to secure.

③

Stuff the crown with crushed newspaper...



Set the hat on the floor. Smooth brim out, trimming with scissors where necessary to shape. Turn the brim up as desired. Let hat dry thoroughly...

④

Carefully remove string and newspaper and paint and decorate the sombrero as desired...

MEXICO

DESCRIPTION: PIÑATA

Piñatas have become almost as popular here in the United States as they are in Mexico. Piñatas are containers made of earthenware or paper mache. They come in all shapes and sizes. Many are shaped like animals and are filled with candy, fruit and toys. The piñatas are particularly popular at Christmastime, after the Posada. At Eastertime, the piñata may be made in the form of Judas Iscariot. This effigy is then broken in the traditional way, much to the delight of the children.

Piñatas are hung in doorways or from tree limbs. They are suspended by ropes so that they can be moved up or down. Children gather around in a large circle, staying far enough away from the child who is blindfolded and chosen to be "it". The blindfolded child is given a stick or a bat, and he/she tries to hit the piñata with the stick. The piñata is dangled tantalizingly close to the stick, but it usually takes several children, taking turns being "it", before the piñata is hit and breaks open, spilling its "goodies" on the ground. At this point, all of the children rush for the "goodies".

In this activity, children will create a simplified piñata, using re-cycled luncheon sacks for the container part of the pinata. The piñatas can then be taken home, filled, and broken open in the traditional way, fostering and re-inforcing multi-cultural understanding in the community. Skills reinforced through this activity include: following directions, tactile/kinesthetic skills, fine motor skills, visual discrimination, oral language, spatial awareness, co-operation, sharing, self-confidence, self-interests and nutrition.

MATERIALS:

- Luncheon sacks--1 per child (have the children save the sacks from lunch.)
- White or colored paper
- Crepe paper--various colors
- Scissors
- Paste
- Piñata bird pattern
- Stapler

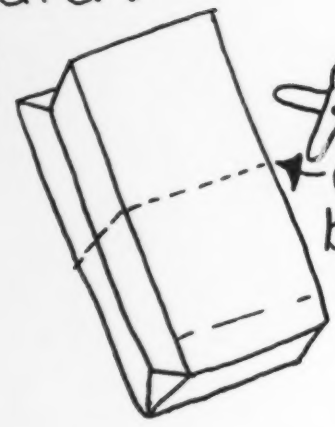
INSTRUCTIONS:

Cut the luncheon sack in half. Take a sheet of white or colored paper and fold it in half. Place the body pattern on the paper, trace it and cut it out. Do the same thing with the head pattern. Paste one body part on each side of the sack. Paste one head part to each side. Cut the crepe paper into thin streamers and decorate the piñata as illustrated. Encourage the children to talk about the kinds of things they could put in the piñata at home. An excellent nutrition lesson can be easily worked into the curriculum at this point.

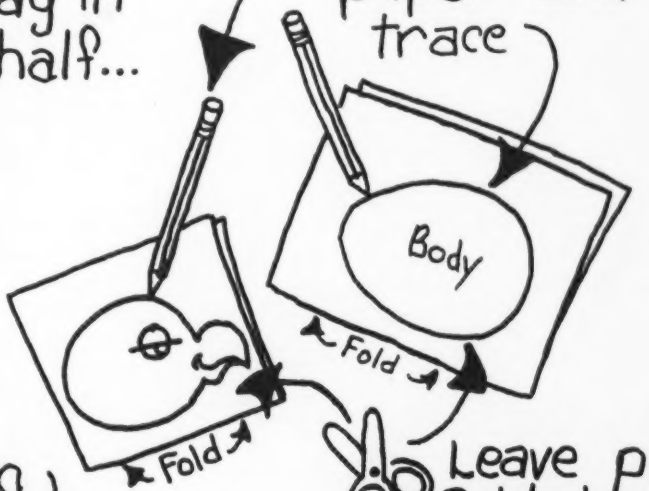
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Make a large class piñata. Fill it with bird seed and have a piñata party for the birds during the winter months.

Piñata:



① Cut lunch bag in half...



② Place pattern pieces on folded paper and trace

Leave paper folded and cut head and body out giving you 2 of each...

③ Paste 1 body and 1 head on each side of bag

Paste noses together...

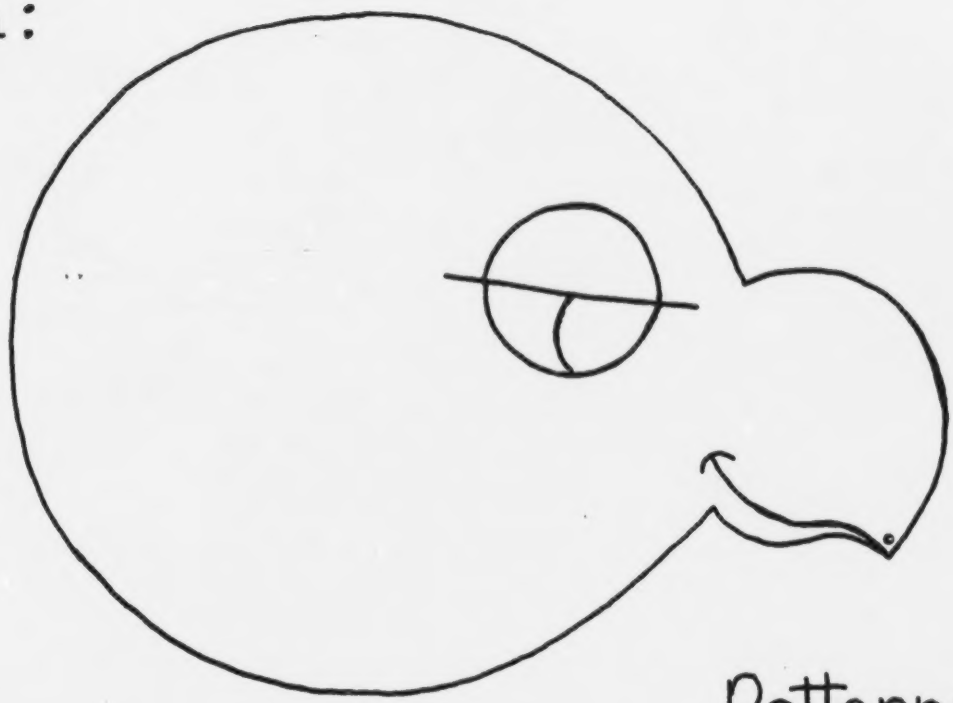
④ Add string to hang

Staple tails together...

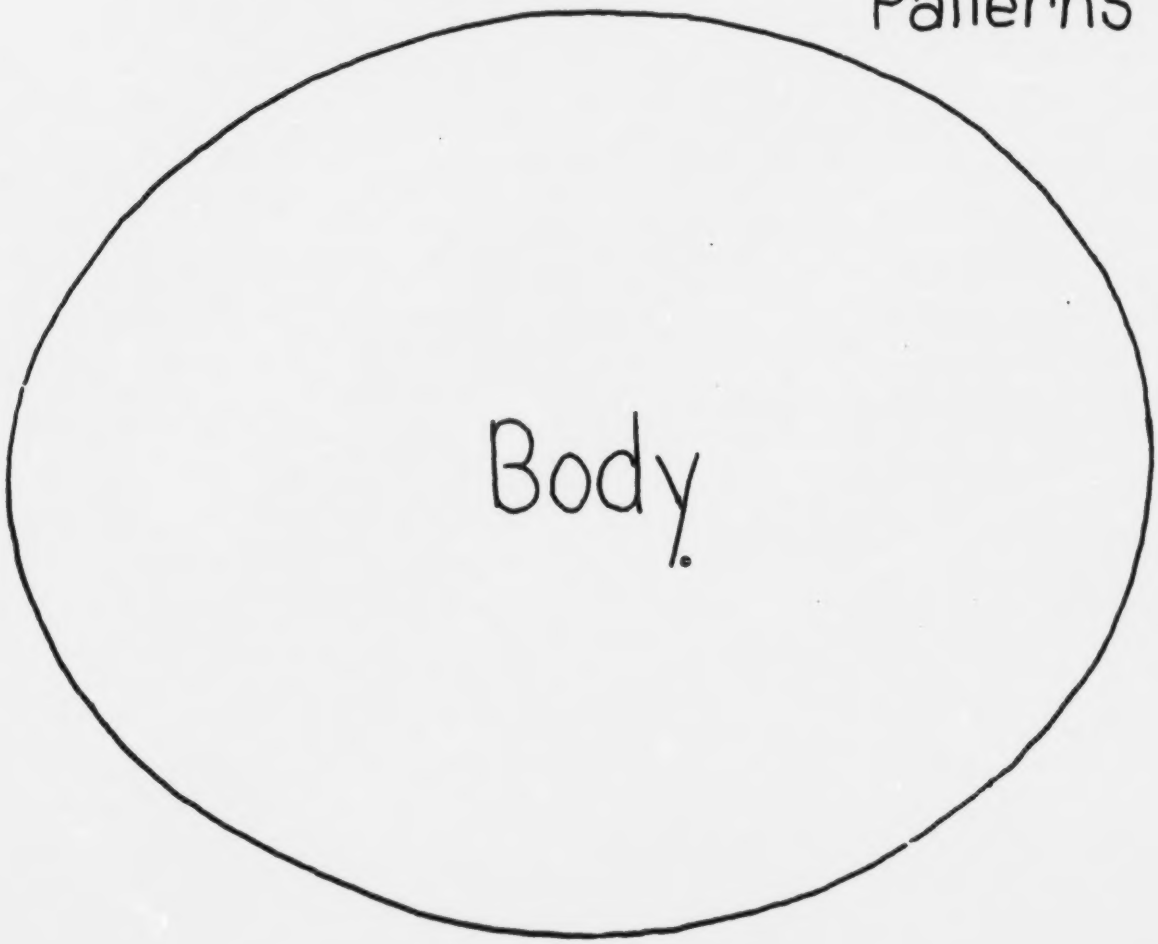
Staple heads together...

Add crepe paper streamers for head, tail and wings... Fill with surprises... Hang to break...

Piñata:



Patterns



THREE KINGS' CAKE

Many parties and celebrations feature a special cake called the Three Kings' Cake. It is baked in the shape of a crown and studded with bits of candied fruit that looks like jewels. A tiny doll is baked inside the cake. It is supposed to bring good luck to the person who finds it.

Ingredients:

6 cups flour
5 egg yolks
3 sticks butter
1/2 tsp. salt
grating of 1/2 lemon
candied fruit pieces
1 egg for varnishing
3 tsp. yeast
5 whole eggs
3/4 cup sugar
2 tsp. vanilla
2 small dolls

Directions:

1. Dissolve yeast in 4 tablespoons water. Add 1.2 cup flour. Shape into ball and let stand in a warm place until doubled in size. (Approx. 1/2 hour)

2. Make a ring with the rest of the flour. Pour into the center the 5 whole eggs, 1/2 cup sugar and the salt. Mix. Add margarine, yolks, vanilla, lemon grating, and a small yeast ball. Knead. Shape into one ball. Let stand in warm place, covered with a damp cloth until doubled in size. (20 minutes)

3. Knead and roll. Shape into a ring. Place on a greased cookie sheet. Decorate with candied fruit and varnish with egg. Sprinkle with sugar.

4. Bake in preheated 350 degree oven for one half hour until golden brown.

5. When it is cool, make two cuts underneath cake and hide dolls.

RESOURCES

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